

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest – 2004

Third Prize: Aaron Williams, St. Anthony School

The Civil Rights Movement began in 1954 when Thurgood Marshall, an attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, represented a case banning segregation in schools, which was later approved by the Supreme Court. Many people think Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ended the Civil Rights Movement, but they are wrong. You ask why they are wrong because you can still find racism in many places today. It happens everywhere; people just do not notice that the struggle still continues throughout the world today.

During Dr. King's life he had many speeches, protests, and successes to help African Americans. The first protest he was involved in was the Montgomery Bus Boycott which is where blacks were forced to give up their seats in the front of the bus when a white person wanted a seat. A woman, Rosa Parks, refused and was sent to jail. After this happened African Americans refused to ride the bus for more than a year. Finally, a law was passed stating that any person could sit anywhere on a bus. In 1957, Dr. King established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization of black churches, ministers, and people whose goal was to challenge segregation. In 1959, Dr. King visited India and adopted Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi's method of non-violent protests. He had many protests and speeches that involved many members of the SCLC, but one of his most famous achievements was his "I Have a Dream" speech which took place in Washington D.C. at the Lincoln Memorial. This speech was for the jobs and civil rights of African Americans. After this speech Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited segregation in public places and prohibited discrimination in education and employment. Also for his "I Have a Dream" speech he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The Nobel Prize is awarded to individuals for amazing contributions in the fields of physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, international peace, and economic sciences.

Another protest he was involved in was "Bloody Sunday". The goal of the protest was to march from Selma, Alabama to Montgomery, Alabama, over fifty miles away to draw attention to blacks voting rights. Fifty marchers were hospitalized after police used tear gas, whips, and clubs against them. About 2 weeks after the "Bloody Sunday" protest more than 3000 people set out for the capitol Montgomery, Alabama. The march took 5 days and on the 5th day Dr. King addressed more than 20, 000 people in front of the capitol building. After this march President Lyndon Johnson passed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Following the Selma marches Dr. King had very few successes and many of the white Americans who supported Dr. King thought his job was finished, but in reality, it was not even close, the struggle still continued.

After Dr. King's assassination on April 4th, 1968, many people were outraged and riots took place in over 100 American cities. On April 11th, 1968 President Johnson passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968 that prohibited discrimination in sale, financing, and rental of households. Following the death of Dr. King, it was clear racial problems still existed in

the United States such as, segregation in schools and unfair opportunities for blacks in the job market. The problem with segregation in schools was that bus drivers had to bus children out of school districts. Busing of African American children continued, although disliked by many whites. The Supreme Court forced cities such as, Charlotte, Boston, and Denver to do this until the late 1990s. On November 22nd, 1991 President Bush signed the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which strengthened existing civil rights laws. In 1992, the first race riot in over a decade erupted in Los Angeles, California after a jury finds 4 white police officers guilty for the videotaped beating of African American, Rodney King, the struggle still continued.

Since 1992 there have not been any major Civil Rights achievements, but that does not mean that the struggle for Civil Rights is over. People say Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. represented the end of the Civil Rights Movement, but in reality they are wrong. There may not have been any major events of racism, but there were many minor events since 1992. Everyday there are racial problems around every street corner towards people of every culture. There are racial problems in schools, businesses, and places you would not think there would be any. Racial problems are happening everyday, everywhere, and at anytime. The way to end this is to finish what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. started. We need to finish Dr. King's dream that "my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." This is what Dr. King tried to achieve, and this is what we must finish.

Resource List

Civil Rights Movement. 14. Nov. 2004.

www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html

Encarta Encyclopedia. CD-ROM. Microsoft Corporation, 2002.

Frady, Marshall, Martin Luther King, Jr. New York: Penguin Lives, 2002.